

## **Teddy Bear by 000Unknown000**

**Series:** Strange Bonds [6]

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Becky Ives, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Terry Ives

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-09-29

**Updated:** 2018-09-29

**Packaged:** 2022-04-23 02:42:40

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 4,038

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

“Jane.” She spoke, as if to reassure herself it actually was her. El diverted her eyes to the ground.

“I take it you’d like an explanation.” Jim said with a grimace. Becky looked up at him, eyes hardening.

A visit for El’s mother.

## Teddy Bear

### Author's Note:

There's a short bit in here talking about suicide and rumors people spread about it, so if that's something you're sensitive to, than feel free to read something else.

I tried to not spend weeks on this one, but it now it feels rushed smh

Please enjoy!

“You sure about this?”

El looked up she finished threading her arms through the oversized jacket. It was one of Jim's, every time he saw the way the thing nearly engulfed her petite frame, he'd offer to get her own jacket, but each time she'd declined. She liked the way it felt like a blanket wrapped around her, like a constant hug (though she'd never voice that out loud.)

“Yes”.

The honest answer was no. She didn't think she'd ever be. Her heart was clenched inside her chest, her lungs felt like they were filled with cement, and her stomach threatened to turn inside out, but that didn't matter. The thought of shying away inside the cabin made her feel even worse.

It didn't help that it was a mere week since the gate. She still felt remnants of the exhaustion and headaches, and the splotches of bruises that tainted her skin where only now fading away.

The images and sensations were still freshly burned into her mind, searing itself into a scar full of frightening memories. Of the sickeningly familiar corridors, flooded with the flashing red light of the alarms, luring up the bodies of soldiers and scientists. Some with trails of smeared blood from when they tried to crawl to safety,

others with half eaten guts spilling over.

She could still hear echoes of the screeches of demodogs, his soldiers. The hellish way the earth itself seemed to have split open, blasting fiery red through the membranes, pulsating like a monstrous heart. She kept seeing the silhouette of the shadow, head alone big enough to fill the gate. She could almost feel its bloodlust radiating off it, the desperate, her rage full urge to end her.

As much terror as that day gave her, it also brought her a sense of closure. She unleashed the creatures of the upside down to the world, and now she shut them out, ensuring they can no longer hurt anyone.

At least, she hoped.

She ducked her head and opened the locks, watching the fragments of metal shift and turn with satisfaction.

Locks fascinated her, they were tiny hunks of metal and plastic meticulously shaped to deny everyone in the world access to something valuable but her. One time, Jim brought home a bunch of small puzzles for her, some of which included various types of locks that she spent hours mentally dissecting.

Closing the locks behind her after Jim exited, she practically sped walked the distance to the Blazer, with him following some distance behind.

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The car ride was long, with El staring out the window, soaking up the neighborhoods and towns as much as she could. Old 70's music drones on from the radio, trying to fill up the silence.

Many of the trees were either bare, reaching up to the sky with long, thin arms, or were covered in flurries of bright reds, oranges, purples, and yellows, splashing color over the land.

There were some remnants of halloween left. Ghosts and skeletons hung from trees, black, orange and yellow streamers appeared on some houses, signs left up with phrases like "Trick or, treat", or "Happy Halloween!". This was what would of greeted her if she was

allowed a night of trick or treating.

The journey was broken up by a stop at a small, flat building with a sign saying “Ray’s Gas”. Jim gave El strict orders not to leave the car, before putting the nozzle thing inside it, disappearing into the building and reappearing with soda and chips for the both of them and returning to the nozzle.

El stared down at the bright red can in her hand, fingers curled tightly around the chilly aluminum. The letters looked like they were painted on in white paint by an artist, spelling out the words Coca Cola. She was embarrassed to admit she still couldn’t figure out the correct way to pronounce it, whenever the television turned to attractive people at the beach or party, faces plastered with huge smiles while practically chugging the brown liquid, she’d immediately change the channel.

It was identical to the one presented to her in the small room with the window, with Papa and those strange men eying her. The needle attached to the wires on her head scratching across the paper faster and faster as she gave everything she could to crush it despite the pressure growing inside her skull, fueled by fear. She was happy when Papa told her he was proud, that she was getting stronger. No, not of her, her gifts, she wasn’t happy, she was relieved.

El huffed, popping the lid open and taking a swift swig of the sweet drink, slightly startled by the way it fizzed in her tongue.

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She felt better afterwards, telling Jim of a book she recently finished about the solar system “Told you you’re a fast learner. That takes a lot of smarts.” He said with a smile that had a somber echo to it during an explanation of how the sun was made of gas rather than fire.

El smiled a little at that, deciding now was not the time to wonder about the ghost of a girl named Sarah.

He told her numerous times, when he would bring home books about topics ranging from math, to science, to English. Telling her “You’re

trying to learn years worth of stuff in a few months, give it time.” Whenever she would grow frustrated with the long, foreign looking words and problems.

El wondered how well she’d do if she ever got the chance to go to school. She wasn’t naive enough to think she wouldn’t struggle. She was far behind from everyone she knew, and the scar beneath Mike’s chin was a reminder that not all the people there are good.

But it would be oh so nice, being with her friends everyday, learning about all the things she was denied access to for so long, and just having the daily routine of a normal child.

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Her daydreams were forgotten once she started to recognize the landscape. All the dread and anxiety struck back at her tenfold when the house came into view.

Heart beating more frantically, breathes growing shallow.

What would she say when Becky asked about her sister? She can’t let Jim know, how would she tell him? Would Becky be angry with her? Would Jim?

She learned to fear the anger of importance figured in her life a long time ago, fighting to please as much as she could, petrified of the feeling the effects of disappointment.

She stared up at the small house with the purple grey rooftops that gave her an air of foreboding as the car pulled up to a stop on the gravel driveway. Jim sighed, chewing on his lip while contemplating something before turning to El.

“You ready?”

Does he not already know she would lie?

El nodded her head, not trusting her voice. She needed to get this over and done with.

Clearly, he didn’t believe her, placing his hand on her shoulder, a

heavy, yet gentle weight. El let her guard down, unmasking to him the dread in her eyes.

Not knowing what to say, he gingerly squeezed her shoulder before opening the car door.

Their feet trodded slowly along the pretty stones covering the walkway and up the steps to the porch. El froze, eying the black patterns swirling across the glass window in the door, contents of the house blurred by a cream curtain. The first time she stood in front of this door, she was scared, maybe even more so than she is now, not then knowing what to expect. But at least then she had a new life to look forward to. A way to magically reverse everything taken from her by the people of the lab.

Jim pressed a button near the door handle, making El jump when a loud ring sounded throughout the house. They saw a figure appear around the hall, pausing before walking to the door. The curtain lifted, revealing Becky's face. Going from confused to shocked, she flung the door open, wide eyes landing on El first.

"Jane." She spoke, as if to reassure herself it actually was her. El diverted her eyes to the ground.

"I take it you'd like an explanation." Jim said with a grimace. Becky looked up at him, eyes hardening.

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The noise of the door shutting sounded loud behind El, not necessarily slamming into the frame, but closing harder than needed.

"Why didn't you return my calls?" She hissed, walking close behind Jim.

Better him than her.

"Hey, hey, the phone lines are tapped, they would of heard us." He reasoned, thinking of how Jonathan and the Wheeler girl managed to use one phone call to trick the lab into kidnapping them. He would of yelled his lungs out at them if he wasn't at the time completely exhausted.

“They?” Becky asked.”

El retreated down the hall, slowing to stop. She took a deep breath and turned into the room on the left.

There she sat, unmoving in the rocking chair, head turned to the television in front of her. This time she wore a dull green dress with a white shawl tossed around her shoulders, blonde hair pulled into a disheveled ponytail, but not by her choice. The scene looked almost serene, a woman relaxing while watching television.

El tried and failed to pull her lips into a smile, walking across the creaky floor while gently saying “Hey momma, it’s me Jane.” El kneeled on the floor, covering her cold, bony hand with her own in case her voice wasn’t enough to make her presence known. Her skin felt soft, almost too soft, like her hand would shatter if held without care.

“I’m sorry I didn’t come sooner. Not safe.” El continued. Her mother’s head turned, soft brown eyes meeting her. For a split second, El thought she saw a glimmer, a spark of life within her, but her eyes grew empty again. Her mother’s mouth opened, releasing the words. “Breathe, sunflower, 4 to the right, 3 to the left, rainbow, 450.”

Tears welled in El’s eyes, blurring her vision. She took a shaky breath and held her eyes open, hoping the air would dry out her tears. She won’t let momma see her cry.

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“Why didn’t you tell me about her when you first came here? You knew about my sisters daughter, yet you didn’t bother saying anything?!” Becky whispered harshly, not wanting let Jane hear her.

Hopper removed his hat onto the table, reaching for the pack of cigarettes tucked into his pocket. Lately he’s been going through pack after pack, he was sure that by the end of the year, his lungs would shrivel up.

“Because, I didn’t know where she was. When I broke into the lab, she had already escaped. Besides, you wouldn’t have believed me.”

He saw Becky deflate at that, though she still seemed upset. He didn't like it, but he couldn't really blame her.

"Wait, You broke into a government lab." It sounded less like a question and more of a exclamation.

"Yeah, I was looking for another missing kid." He quickly muttered while searching for his lighter, hoping she wouldn't ask too many questions. He still didn't know how much he should tell her.

She paused for a long time looking down at her hands while mulling over his words. She pulled out her own pack of cigarettes. Lighting one up before handing the lighter to Hopper. "Thanks" He said.

Progress.

She took a slow, long drag, watching the cloud of smoke flow from her mouth.

The silence became too much, so he continued explaining, "She's been staying with me for about a year now, been helping her stay hidden.

Becky lowered her cig, looking like she suddenly felt sick.

"Why did she escape?" She said, voice small.

His chest tightened at that, thinking of the many nights he would check on El while she slept in her room. Only to see her hands clench in her sleep, body twitching and face contorted into looks of fear and agony. Sometimes, she'd talk in her sleep. The words he would make out were almost always "No", and "Papa".

He thought about what the Wheeler kid told him about her opening the gate, no, that's not the real reason, she would of returned if being with that Brenner bastard made her feel anywhere close to safe.

"I'm not too sure what they did to El, the lab's not exactly her favorite subject, but....." He paused to find the right words. Watching the smoke from his and Becky's cigarettes mingle together. "...they hurt her, treated her like some weapon."

He let his words sink in, seeing the way her eyes begun to shine a little too much.

“What....can she do?” She asked with a mixture of curiosity and hints of fear.

He considered telling her about the gate. He still couldn’t wrap his head around what he witnessed. El rising above him, face contorted into more sheer anger than any one kid should hold inside, near inhuman scream ringing in his ears while she pushed away the looming creature responsible for this shit show, shutting the gate in its face. And how quickly she collapsed, arms weakly clinging around his neck, before going completely limp.

“Well... she flipped a car once.”

“A car?!” Becky said, eyebrows shooting up.

“Yeah.” He responded with a weird sense of pride. “El’s a lot stronger than she looks”

“El?” She said, face scrunching at the strange name.

“Short for Eleven, it’s what her friends call her— the group of kids who found her in the woods. She’s got the number tattooed on her wrist.” He informed her, remembering his struggle to hold back the fury welling inside him when she showed him the ink permanently punctured into her skin, marking her as a weapon, instead of an innocent child. Screw innocent, she been stripped of her innocence a long time ago.

“Jesus Christ.....” Becky muttered, hand running through her short, mocha colored hair. It was similar to El’s, maybe a bit lighter, and had a slightly curly texture to it. Perhaps when El’s hair grew out of it’s tight ringlets of curls, it would look like her aunt’s hair. He could see a few grey hairs sprouting at the roots, matching the fine wrinkles forming around her face. Hopper wondered if she was actually old enough for the signs of aging to appear.

She slowly shook her head, taking deep breaths. “I should of fucking listened to her”.

He knew that look, it was one he saw on Joyce's face far too many times. She would always blame herself for everything Will went through. Finding every reason in the world as to why she somehow failed as a parent. He didn't doubt for a second that same look wasn't on his face, wishing he never lied to Becky, and especially to El.

"Hey." He said in What he hoped was a comforting voice. "She told you her baby was taken by the government and has superpowers, you would've of been crazy to have believed her."

"Yeah, but I should have. For Christ's sake, she's my sister, I should of been there for her." She insisted, a painful glint of anger in her eyes, a thin, near invisible tear falling across her cheek, though she didn't bother to wipe it away.

"You're here now." He responded without thinking.

She either believed him, or couldn't muster the energy to argue. She looked to her right. Hopper followed her gaze to El, who was perched beside her mother with her head down, cradling Terry's hand while she blankly stared past her.

El's body was stiff, with her shoulders shaking a little every now and then, like she might of been fighting against sobs. God, if he could magically fix whatever those sick fucks did her mother, he wouldn't hesitate.

"Can she stay here?" The question took him off guard. He found himself racking his brain as to why she would want a test subject being hunted down by the government in her home.

Than it hit him, she wanted El to here with her mother, so she wouldn't be scared for her child anymore. He knew all too well how Terry must of felt when she realized her daughter was ripped away from her. The overwhelming desperation to do something, anything to bring them back. Even if she's only semi aware of the world, having El constantly with her would be a blessing.

"I wish she could." He meant it. As much as he selfishly wanted El to himself, to be a father again, he'd want her to stay if that's what she wanted.

For a split second, he thought about Benny. In his mind's eye he saw the body of his friend slumped over, gun positioned in his hand with blood clotting over the hole in his head, put there because he tried to help a scared kid.

He heard the rumors, grieving friends and family wondering how the hell they could not of seen the supposed sickness that drove him to end it, picking apart every word he said to them. He also heard the hushed whispers, those fortunate enough to not understand, labeling the kind, yet strong man as weak while Hopper hid his clenched fists in his pockets, only for the knuckles to wound up bruised anyway.

Hopper cared, but Becky wouldn't if he told her, it wouldn't hurt her to say his name like it would hurt him.

He swiftly decided that he couldn't, telling her instead, "If they could do that to her your sister—" He gestured to the shell of a woman,—"than what would they do to you?" He aimed his finger back to Becky.

She looked down, more tears spilling over her reddened cheeks. Hopper almost wished he could hug her.

"Maybe she can visit, but it wouldn't be often." He said, fully aware that alone wouldn't comfort her.

The house was eerily quiet, randomly snuffed out by Becky's soft sniffles and the occasional flare up of voices from the tv. They could both hear El murmuring to her mother in the next room.

At this point, Becky had dumped the remnants of her cigarette onto the ash tray, only to reach for another. She chewed the inside of her cheek, brown eyes that matched her sisters staring off into space. Her attention went back to Hopper.

"Are there others?" She gestured over to El with her eyes.

"I don't know." He replied tamely. He liked to think she was the only child put through that kind of hell, that there weren't others out there in need of rescuing with no hope of receiving it. He scoured every missing kid's case he could get his hands on, knowing full well

he didn't hold the power to find and save them.

He wanted to think El was the only one, but his gut told him otherwise.

Becky didn't seem satisfied. "Well, did she find the girl?"

"What girl?" He said, growing confused.

"The girl Terry showed her." Becky said like he should know. "She managed to 'talk' to her somehow." Becky raised her hands in quotations when she said 'talk'. "She said she showed her a memory of Jane being with another girl when she was younger. She was trying to look for before taking my money and bolting".

He looked back at El. "Kid never said anything about a girl." He said, eyes not leaving the child.

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El hung onto just about every word, heart quickening when Kali was mentioned. She'll tell them no, let them believe she ran back to Hawkins instead of Chicago.

She looked back to her mother, images flashed in her head of dark, rich skin framed by wild purple hair, all centered around deep brown eyes surrounded by black makeup, eyes that were warm, yet haunting.

She waited until Becky and Jim resumed talking. "I found her." She softly whispered. "My sister."

El's eyes traced the stitches running along her mother's sleeve. "Her name's Kali, she and her friends, they.....hurt people. The ones who hurt Kali."

El realized her mother had ceased repeating her words, silently staring past her. El allowed herself to believe she was listening.

"She wanted me to kill a man." El wanted to stop talking, but she needed to tell someone. "He.....hurt her. At the lab." She decided to not tell her mother he was the one who shocked her, El feared that

she would be angry inside, disappointed her daughter couldn't avenge her.

"I was going to...." The tears returned. "But I couldn't. He had two kids...."

El sucked in a sharp breathe. "Kali was mad I didn't kill him. Made me see Papa...." The feeling of betrayal lingered, how her own sister used her pain against her, just like Papa used to.....

Her anger gave way to sadness. "I don't know if she's good....." Kali wasn't bad, she cared, she had a heart. A heart that filled when El was with her. She missed the feeling of solidarity, having someone who understood what she went through, someone who knows what it's like to be less than human. Someone who also needed to heal.

El sighed, did Kali heal? She spent years outside the lab, yet, she was still so....broken, needing to hurt people to feel better.

You have a wound, Eleven, a terrible wound.

Would El end up like her? Would she ever heal?

"I want to be good....and better." El whispered, feeling like her emotions were coiling tightly around her lungs. She looked up to see her mother looking back at her.

El smiled through her tears, maybe her mother couldn't speak, but maybe she could hear her.

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The sky peeping through the windows shifted to a muted blue, with a soft warm glow creeping up the horizon. El watched the soft pink walls walls darken, shadows circling around the orange lamp lights. In her hands was the teddy bear meant for her, innocent, dark, glassy eyes staring back up at her.

With her other hand, El played with the circular ring that hung above the cradle, making the small toys swirl around the air like happy little dancing characters.

Who knows how long it took her mother to perfect this room. The hours it took to paint, how many time she stumbled across a toy or pretty decoration and brightened up at the thought of getting it for her unborn child, how many times she sat in this room, dreaming of her new life.

It was a stark contrast with the sterile white walls of El's first room, cold metal bed, a heavy padlock on the door, and a drawing of her being pressured into killing a caged cat for decor.

She heard footsteps approaching down the hall, they sounded light, almost hesitant, so she inferred they were Becky's.

The footsteps stopped just outside the open door "Jane?" El turned her head slightly. "He says it's time to go".

A mixture of relief and unhappiness filled her, drawing her lips in a tight line as she set the teddy bear down within the cradle.

"You should keep it." Surprised, El turned to look at her aunt. She was leaning against the door frame, arms crossed.

"I mean, if you want to. It is yours, after all."

El considered this, picking the bear back up and bringing it to her chest. She followed her to the hall, veering off into the living room to say goodbye to her mother. She wrapped her arms around her in a hug, teddy bear in hand. She pressed her cheek against the top of her head telling her "I have go now." She quickly added "I'll see you again....soon." The word tasted sour on her tongue, like an obvious lie.

"Promise."

She meant it, she'll run away again and walk all the way here through storm after storm if she had to, her mother refused to abandon her, she won't abandon her either.

#### **Author's Note:**

The end unintentionally started to mirror a digital drawing I made of El and her mother (my profile

pic), so I just went with it.

Don't worry, I can only write so much depressing stuff at one time, so the next one I write will be a tad bit fluffier. For my sanity, not yours.